

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Great Plains Research: A Journal of Natural and
Social Sciences

Great Plains Studies, Center for

Spring 2007

Review of *Watchable Birds of the Black Hills, Badlands and Northern Great Plains* by Jan L. Wassink

Paul A. Johnsgard

University of Nebraska-Lincoln, pajohnsgard@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsresearch>



Part of the [Other International and Area Studies Commons](#)

Johnsgard, Paul A., "Review of *Watchable Birds of the Black Hills, Badlands and Northern Great Plains* by Jan L. Wassink" (2007). *Great Plains Research: A Journal of Natural and Social Sciences*. 876.
<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsresearch/876>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Great Plains Studies, Center for at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Great Plains Research: A Journal of Natural and Social Sciences by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

with Arnold G. van der Valk and a few of his peers at other universities being notable exceptions.

The author designed this book as an introductory text in wetland ecology based on a beginning course he teaches at Iowa State University. Although the title suggests a strong focus on biology, the volume's scope is much broader and provides an excellent background for many student interests, including wetland function and ecological processes. The text covers many disciplines involved in wetland ecology, despite the uneven availability of information on specific topics within disciplines. This results in each section providing the needed overview about our state of knowledge without getting highly technical, as specialty or advanced classes require. Hence, students who plan a career in wetlands will need to supplement the information offered here with additional readings and study.

The Biology of Freshwater Wetlands covers the pertinent topics, is easy to follow, and will be of value to students just beginning their study of wetlands. While the author cites the most pertinent literature, the addition of recommended readings at the end of chapters would have been helpful in guiding students as they develop specific interests. The summary at the end of each chapter is useful, and the suggested experiments and observations ought to stimulate students to think more deeply and pursue additional knowledge. The volume is an excellent source of information about freshwater wetlands, providing wide coverage of wetlands around the world. Students of wetland ecology and management will find it of enormous value. **Ned H. Euliss, Jr.**, *Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center, U.S. Geological Survey.*

Watchable Birds of the Black Hills, Badlands and Northern Great Plains. By Jan L. Wassink. Missoula, MT: Mountain Press Publishing, 2006. vii + 231 pp. Map, photographs, glossary, references, species index. \$22.00 paper.

In the sometimes odd vernacular of bird watchers, "watchable" refers to those species that for the most part are fairly easily observed and, by virtue of their behavior or other features, are deemed especially interesting. Of the roughly 400 bird species that occupy the region selected by Wassink (including all of both Dakotas and Nebraska, plus the High Plains of eastern Montana, Wyoming, and northeastern Colorado), he has chosen 84 to

discuss individually. One or more generally high-quality color photos of each of these species are included. He has also included color photos of 71 "similar" species, usually of forms closely related to the 84 primary ones. Up to about 500 words of text are provided for each of these, usually emphasizing breeding behavior and nesting biology. The "similar species" receive short paragraphs of about 100 words. For all species there is an abbreviated "Field Marks" section and a short "Status" statement. Some relatively rare species also have a "Hot Spots" section, indicating locations where each is more likely to be encountered.

In addition to this primary text and photo section, there is a glossary of nearly 60 bird-related terms, plus references to 24 books, four CDs of bird songs, and five periodicals related to birds and birding. Sixteen bird-related Web sites are also listed, without descriptive comments. Lastly, there are names and addresses of 61 recommended birding destinations (19 in Montana, 16 in Nebraska, 14 in North Dakota, 10 in South Dakota, and two in Wyoming). These addresses include phone numbers and, in a few cases, Web site URLs, but provide no further information such as available check lists or reported numbers of species for that site.

This book is clearly directed toward persons without much field experience. The relatively few species included make it of very limited use as a field guide, and the lack of range maps or site maps further limits its general utility. Although a good deal of the text describes species-typical breeding behaviors, no primary literature citations are offered for persons wanting to verify or further investigate these comments. The text is fairly up-to-date, having the most recent American Ornithologists' Union sequence of species and, for example, 2005 population data on the whooping crane.

All told, the book could have easily been made much more useful by providing a better-documented text and associated literature section and specific information on each of the selected birding destinations, such as their locations, unique habitats, and bird "specialties." References on the avifaunas of each of the included states would have been useful too, inasmuch as most of them have recent state "bird books," breeding bird atlases, or at least general distributional surveys. I would not recommend this volume to advanced birders, but the text would be moderately informative for general readers. **Paul A. Johnsgard**, *School of Biological Sciences, University of Nebraska-Lincoln.*